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ABSTRACT

By the year 2000, Connecticut libraries in general will be organized as they now are, serve most of the needs that they currently do, continue to focus on books as their primary stock-in-trade, and look and function very much as they do today. By 2000, however, their basic services will be augmented and strengthened by the use of information technology. The broad access currently provided to books and to audio and video materials, microforms, online databases, and CD-ROM products will be broadened to encompass additional information technologies as they become established and affordable. By 2000, a comprehensive Connecticut Library and Information Network (CLIN) will be coordinating local and regional cooperative library activities and providing a range of statewide services. Remote access to, and delivery of, information will be widely and readily available. Using emerging technology, it will be possible for the CLIN to have in place before the end of this decade the first statewide universal library borrower's card. Each card will contain an electronic user account number and encoded information on the holder's borrowing records, and that, or another card, will also furnish a cash/debit account for fee-based or reciprocal services. In close cooperation with SNETCO, which has responsibility for telecommunication services for Connecticut, CLIN will also arrange, during the coming decade, to emulate throughout the State of Minitel system currently at use in France. This system will be based on the free distribution to all telephone subscribers of a compact computer terminal that will support direct 24-hour-a-day access to a wide variety of information services. It should be recognized, however, that the 1990s will also see an increasing disparity, in Connecticut as elsewhere, in equity of access to library and information services, and this problem must be seriously addressed. (BBM)

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Connecticut Libraries in the Year 2000

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STEADY HABITS and WOODEN NUTMEGS

Connecticut Libraries
in the Year 2000

by
Norman D. Stevens

Published for the
Governor's Conference on Library and Information Services
held in Waterbury, Connecticut, on May 22–24, 1990—
William A. O'Neill, Governor; Richard G. Akeroyd Jr., State Librarian

Connecticut State Library
Hartford, Connecticut
1990

Introduction

Known as the Land of Steady Habits, Connecticut has a reputation for being a conservative state with well established institutions that are slow to change. Known as the state in which shrewd Yankee peddlers developed the practice of selling wooden nutmegs to unsuspecting housewives in lieu of the real thing, Connecticut also has a reputation for sharp practices. As Connecticut libraries move towards the twenty–first century, the question is whether steady habits or sharp practices will prevail. What will Connecticut libraries look like in the year 2000?

Looking at both the long history of libraries in Connecticut—and the fact that its libraries are well established, conservative institutions—and the rapid changes that have taken place in those libraries as they have adapted to new information technologies in the past decade—and the fact that new library organizations have emerged to direct those changes—the answer seems to be that in all likelihood library development in the next decade will be a blend of steady habits and sharp practices. By 2000, Connecticut libraries, in general, will be organized as they now are, serve most of the information and recreational needs that they currently do, continue to focus on books as their primary stock–in–trade, and look and function very much as they do today. By 2000, however, Connecticut libraries will also have begun to respond even more intensively than they already

have to the dramatic changes in information technology that are taking place. Their basic services will be augmented and strengthened by the use of that technology. Subtle but important changes in the way in which library services are offered will have occurred. Experiments in more dramatic changes, which may eventually change the fundamental structure of our libraries, will be under way. Librarians and library users and supporters may even have recognized the true importance of equity of access to libraries and be ready to seriously address the question of information poverty.

To manage another decade of steady habits blended with sharp practices will require careful planning and a thoughtful sense of where libraries ought to be. It will also require a recognition that libraries are not yet the driving force behind developments in information technology although, during the 1990s, they will have become a more significant component of the marketplace for many parts of the information industry. As one of the primary services affected by those developments, libraries will need to continue to be quick to adapt to those developments but cautious by responding to them only as they become established. Connecticut libraries must maintain our tradition of steady habits. Connecticut libraries cannot afford to spend much of their scarce resources on wooden nutmegs.

Steady Habits

To the casual user, and in outward appearance, libraries in Connecticut will not be much different in 2000 than they are in 1990. Their contents, location, number, purpose, size, shape, and support will not have undergone any fundamental change. Libraries will still remain symbols of continuity. Libraries will still be supported financially at a level that supports continuity.

Libraries will continue to have as their primary mission the broad provision of access to books and other information resources on an individual basis. Libraries have a well established mission that is built around that concept. Existing book–based collections—that have benefited from improved conservation and preservation programs in the 1990s—will remain one of the real strengths of libraries. The investment that Connecticut libraries have made in their collections will not, and cannot, be abandoned.

Library collections will continue to be comprised primarily of books that will continue to be published in increasing numbers. The broad access that libraries presently provide not only to books but also to audio and video materials, microforms, online databases, and CD–ROM products will be broadened to encompass additional information technologies as they become established and affordable. The library market will not be large enough to shape the directions that these technologies take. Library budgets will not be large enough

to allow them to experiment with technologies that may not endure.

New libraries will be established during the decade as new organizations and institutions come into being and/or established organizations and institutions recognize the increasing importance that access to information has to their work. Older library buildings will be expanded or renovated, or new facilities built, as existing buildings become inadequate to meet growth in collections and services including, in particular, the more widespread use of technology. Nevertheless, the libraries that now exist in Connecticut, and their current buildings, will continue to be the basis around which library services are offered.

Nor will the organization of libraries in Connecticut have changed substantially. The focus will continue to be on the provision of library service through established political and organizational entities. Local public and school libraries, academic libraries, and special libraries, all of which exist primarily to support the broader goals and objectives of a community or institution, will continue to form the basis for library service throughout the state. The Connecticut State Library will retain its diverse roles, including an enhanced role in the provision of information services to various components of state government, but will have more clearly identified its role in coordinating statewide library systems, services, and support for libraries of all kinds as a

separate major function. The Cooperating Library Service Units and other non–profit systems that libraries have already joined together to establish and support will continue to be the primary basis for networking and other cooperative resource–sharing efforts among Connecticut libraries. There will be broader participation in those efforts by school, smaller public, and special libraries; and an academic library network may develop. By 2000, however, a comprehensive Connecticut Library and Information Network—supported by contributions from participating libraries and library networks supplemented by state funds and governed by the participants—will be coordinating local and regional cooperative library activities and providing a range of statewide services.

Those directions will be shaped in large measure by the fact that the financial support for libraries will not have undergone any fundamental changes in amount or sources. It most likely will continue to be a struggle for libraries to maintain present levels of financial support, adjusted for inflation, and to secure modest increases to help meet the enlarged service demands that have been placed upon them. Federal support will have diminished and be directed towards designated library activities and programs. State support will be substantially the same as at present except as libraries, working together, will have

identified appropriate statewide services that require state funding, including a few new initiatives that will help shape new directions for libraries in the twenty–first century. Local and institutional funding will continue to provide the fundamental support for Connecticut libraries. Cooperative library resource–sharing activities will still be supported primarily by conscious decisions on the part of individual libraries to use their financial and personnel resources in support of those activities. Control of those activities will remain in the hands of representative bodies established and elected by participating libraries.

Sharp Practices

The focus of libraries in Connecticut will have been clearly recognized as being, as it already has become, on the provision of information services that provide broader access to information; not, as it once was, on library collections and buildings, even though they may still be the outward symbols of libraries. The sharp practices that libraries have initiated in the past two decades in their quest to make the best use of scarce resources by working together to develop new programs, share costs, improve services, and broaden access to information will have long since been firmly established.

The increased emphasis on a high quality of service will include a clear recognition of the importance of developing a strong body of library staff

throughout all Connecticut libraries. That well educated and adequately paid staff will be committed to maintaining an awareness of the rapid changes that are occurring in libraries and, especially, in information technology. Its focus will be on the provision of the highest level of library service to meet as many of the information needs of individual library users as possible. Connecticut librarians will be among the best paid in the country. The quality of Connecticut libraries, and of their cooperative activities, will enable them to recruit and retain the best qualified librarians in the country.

One key to the ability of librarians to provide that level of service will be in the availability, in whatever form it may have taken, of a broad–based and comprehensive bibliographic data base representing the retrospective holdings of all Connecticut libraries as well as current additions to their collections. That massive data base will contain records for the holdings of almost every library in Connecticut. It will be accessible, via a statewide library telecommunications network, to every library in Connecticut.

Many other information services, especially ones that are computer based and accessible via telecommunication systems, will have become more widely available during the 1990s. Connecticut libraries will be concentrating on the provision of access to information not contained in their own collections and, in

many cases, not immediately available in Connecticut. Connecticut libraries routinely will be serving as gateways to a wide variety of machine–based information systems and as conduits to information contained in libraries and other information sources throughout the world. In addition, with a well established Connecticut bibliographic data base in place, Connecticut libraries will have begun to focus on providing access to the factual and numeric full text and full image data that will be more widely available through computer technology.

Access will be enhanced by a substantially improved delivery system that provides for the overnight transfer from library to library of books and other physical information sources, as needed, as well as for the instantaneous delivery, by telefacsimile and other information transfer systems, of smaller information units. That comprehensive Connecticut delivery system, linked to a New England–wide system, will be one of the key services of the Connecticut Library and Information Network.

Remote access to, and delivery of, information without the necessity of an individual physically visiting a library will be widely and readily available. Home and office access to the Connecticut bibliographic data base, as well as gateway services to other information sources, will be routinely available to individuals and organizations that have access to a computer. The delivery system, especially

the telecommunications-based component, will also be directly available to individuals and organizations.

Wooden Nutmegs

If Connecticut libraries are to prosper in the twenty-first century, the scenario described above, which largely builds upon existing strengths, will not suffice. Bold adventures in developing new aspects of library service will need to be attempted as pilot projects to determine if there is indeed a place for these as yet untested wooden nutmegs. Scarce resources that may not meet all current library needs must somehow be gathered together in a cooperative effort to begin to meet new needs and to provide enhanced services. Given the rapid changes in technology that are taking place, it is impossible to define precisely at this time what all of those projects might be. There are four examples that illustrate what new services Connecticut libraries can provide by 2000.

Connecticut libraries, like libraries in several other states, will have endorsed the concept that, taken together, their collections constitute a statewide library collection readily accessible to all citizens. Using emerging technology, whose development is being pioneered in Connecticut, it will be possible for the Connecticut Library and Information Network to have in place, before the end of this decade, the first statewide universal library borrower's card. That

card, which will be renewed periodically through any library, will be valid, without further registration or verification, at any library in the state. It will be the basis for a substantial enhancement of the current Connecticard reciprocal borrowing program. Each individual user's card will contain an electronic user account number and magnetic striping that will allow for the encoding of a variety of information, including the holder's borrowing records, to assist libraries in such functions as recovering overdue materials and/or restricting borrowing privileges. That, or a similar card, will also furnish a cash/debit account that will provide ready access to fee-based or reciprocal services. The amount encoded will represent a local or state library entitlement and/or payments made by the individual borrower. This card will represent a significant step forward in improving access to information and in the public recognition that all library collections constitute an invaluable state resource.

In close cooperation with SNETCO, which has responsibility for telecommunication services for the entire state, the Connecticut Library and Information Network will arrange, during the coming decade, to emulate, throughout Connecticut, the Minitel system currently in use in France. That system, which may well be the first of its kind in the United States, will be based on the free distribution to all telephone subscribers of a compact computer

terminal that will support direct twenty-four-hour-a-day access to a wide variety of information services including an electronic telephone directory, the Connecticut data base, a reference-inquiry program, and other similar services developed by individual libraries and library networks.

Historically, library service in Connecticut, especially public library service, has been provided at the local level through a wide range of library units of varying size. That pattern, which will not change dramatically in the next decade, has been a source of pride and has served library users reasonably well. It no longer serves all users equally well because smaller libraries have limited access to the information technology that is so readily available in the larger libraries that predominate. While changes in the pricing of information technology will make it more readily available to smaller libraries in the coming decade, there are limits in that respect. By the end of the 1990s the first regional library, operated by one of the Cooperating Library Service Units, will have been established in either the northeastern or northwestern part of the state. Funded by the participating communities, with substantial state support for a building and other start-up costs, that regional library, which will be located after careful study of current and projected population and traffic paterns in the designated area, will be large enough to ensure its users

full access to the integrated library collections and information services available in Connecticut. It will serve as a model to be used in the development of a careful plan for the systematic rebuilding and restructuring of libraries in Connecticut in the first half of the twenty–first century.

Public attachment to, and the genuine need for, more immediate library service points will not be overlooked. The universal library borrower's card and related technology, which is now being pioneered in a few video rental stores, will be utilized in a bold experiment late in the decade. In conjunction with the development of the first regional library, a few of the smaller existing public libraries in the region will be replaced by conveniently located, 24–hour, self–service, automated library service units. Those units, which will contain a limited collection of current library materials along with access to an online listing of those materials and the larger Connecticut data base, will be accessible through a robotic device activated by the universal library borrower's card. That device will indicate available items, dispense them automatically, record the transaction, debit for charges, and have a mechanism for the return of materials. It will also allow users to place holds, request materials to be delivered, and carry out a variety of other simple circulation–related functions.

Beyond 2000

With the continued improvemen of current patterns of library services throughout the 1990s, and the development of a few experimental projects by the end of the decade, by the year 2000 Connecticut will have the best program of any state in terms of providing broad public access to a wide range of library and information services. By 2000, or shortly thereafter, virtually every citizen of Connecticut will reside in a community, or have an affiliation with an organization or institution, that will provide him/her with that access. In addition, a large number of citizens will have immediate remote access, either at home and/or at work, to a full range of library services.

The 1990s will also see an increasing disparity, in Connecticut as elsewhere, in equity of access to library and information services. The more affluent, better-educated, and employed citizens of Connecticut will have virtually unlimited and inexpensive access through libraries to an array of information services. Special targeted groups with unique needs, such as the blind and physically handicapped, will also see further improvements in their access to appropriate special library services.

The inequities in Connecticut's current system of public education, which—despite state equalization formulas—still enable wealthier communities to provide the same or a higher level of education at the same or less cost than poorer

communities, are now at least clearly understood. By the end of this decade we will have begun to fully recognize the substantial inequities in access to information and library services that exist, and which may well have intensified during the 1990s, and be ready to eliminate those inequities.

The Governor's Conference on Library and Information Services of 2000 will address the question of information poverty in Connecticut and take steps to make access to library and information services truly equitable.